

CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

JOSEPH *and his* BRETHREN.

PART IV.



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CHAP. XLV. (2)
SUNDAY READING
JOSEPH and his BRETHREN
JOSEPH, &c.

“**A**LL these things are against me,” said good old Jacob, when he was told of what had happened to his sons in Egypt; for we may remember that they had been obliged by Joseph to leave their brother Simeon behind them, and had even been required to bring Benjamin also: On hearing this, old Jacob cried out, “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take away Benjamin: all these things are against me.”

Ah! how little did Jacob know of the real nature of those events which were befalling him! The very things which he said were against him, in fact were making for him, for they led the way to the recovery of his son Joseph, who had been lost, and also to Jacob's removal, with all his family, into the plentiful land of Egypt. I do not wonder, indeed, that this poor old man, bowed down as he now was with age and infirmity, and deprived, as he had been, first of one dear son, and then of another, should be unwilling to let his present favorite Benjamin be carried off into Egypt.—And yet, what could he do? The famine now again grew very sore in the land, and at last, when all the corn from Egypt was eaten up, even Jacob

himself is represented as asking his sons to go again and buy a little food.

“Then Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, ye shall not see my face, except your brother Benjamin be with you.—Unless therefore thou send him, we will not go down to Egypt.” Then Jacob said unto his sons, “Why did ye tell the man that you had a brother?” And they answered, “The man did examine us closely about our kindred, and therefore we told him, for how should we know that he would bid us fetch our brother to him?” Then Judah said very earnestly, “I pray you send the lad, that we may not all die, we and our little ones, and I will be surety for him.” And Jacob said, “If it must be so, do then as you desire. But take ye the best fruits in the land, balm, and honey, and spices, and myrrh, and nuts, and almonds; and take double money in your hands, and the money that you brought back in your sack’s mouths carry again; peradventure it was an oversight. Take also your brother with you, and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and let Benjamin return also.—If I must be bereaved of my children, there is no help for it, I must be bereaved.”

Thus did the sons of Jacob depart, all of them trembling with anxiety and fear, and using many precautions to avoid giving offence to the great person to whom they were going.

Now this, I may observe, is a picture of what sometimes happens to us. God is perhaps preparing to favour us with some great blessing, just as he was now about to favor the family of Jacob; but before he gives us possession of the blessing, he

leads us through some dark and dreary path, and we fancy a great evil is coming upon us. When therefore God is opening the way to these new mercies, we hang back, and say with good old Jacob, "All these things are against me." But though loth to move forward, yet what can we do? Some peril greater than that we had been dreading awaits us if we make more delay. With a heavy heart, with a complaining tongue, and with weeping eyes, we set forward in this path, which is in fact, nevertheless, the path to our chief happiness. Thus do we often quarrel with our blessings. And this I take it is a common case; for what are all our complains but complaints against Providence, and do we not often murmur even at those very dealings of Providence which afterwards prove the most remarkably for our good?

Reader, look back to your past life: consider those seasons in it when you have been forced by necessity on some unpleasant business, or when you have been hindered in your pursuit of some favorite plan, or contradicted in your opinions or your wishes. Now and then perhaps your situation in life has seemed quite melancholy and desperate; misery has appeared to threaten you on every side, and you have had only a sad choice of evils just like these sons of Jacob, who thought they had only to chuse between a famine at home, and the dread of more ill usage in Egypt. And yet has it not afterwards proved, that God was blessing you by means of those very things which were thought at the time so terrible?

There are many persons, I am persuaded, who have even had their souls saved much in the same

way in which this family of Jacob had their lives preserved. They have hung back and struggled hard for a while against those very things which have opened the way to their eternal salvation: they have been dragged from a life of sin and misery as unwillingly as ever Jacob's sons were dragged from Canaan and brought into the fruitful land of Egypt. For how unwilling are men to have their souls saved! how unwilling at least to take those means which are absolutely necessary for it! How many servants, as well as apprentices, and others are there who can hardly be persuaded to attend at public worship, or at least to give their minds to it when they are there; and yet is not this one of the means of salvation? They must be forced to church by the authority of their masters, or by some necessity almost as urgent as that which drove the sons of Jacob from Canaan into Egypt! Again, how many children are there, who, though invited freely to a Sunday School, nevertheless hang back from going thither as much as ever the sons of Jacob hung back from going into Egypt. Perhaps too their parents have at the same time been as unwilling to part with them through some false fondness or other, as ever old Jacob was to part with his son Benjamin, though it proved afterwards to be the making of that whole family.

But let us return to the story. Joseph's Brethren set off from Canaan under a great fright, as I have already told you, and they took double money in their hand, and they carried Benjamin with them, and having come down to Egypt, they stood before Joseph. Now when Joseph saw them and observed that Benjamin also was with them, he ordered a great dinner to be made ready, and he

asked them to come to it. And Joseph's Brethren were afraid, on account of the money which they had carried off in their sacks, and they got near to Joseph's steward, and said to him, "O! Sir, we came down hither before to buy food, and it came to pass, that when we got to the inn on our way home, we found every man's money in his sack's mouth, and therefore we have brought it back to you. We cannot tell who put it there, and we have now brought other money also, in order to buy food.—And the steward said, Peace be to you, I had your money, and he brought Simeon out to them."

And when Joseph came home, they drew near and offered him the present which they brought, and bowed themselves to the earth before him. And Joseph asked them of their welfare, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spake: is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive; and they bowed down their heads again to the ground. And Joseph lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom you spake to me? and then turning to the lad, "God (said he) be gracious unto thee."—Joseph now was much moved, for his bowels did yearn over his brother, and he sought where to weep, and he entered into his chamber and wept there."

Religion does not deprive men, (as some have imagined) of their natural affection and feeling, for Joseph was a religious man, and yet how did he overflow with kindness towards his Brethren. It is also remarked in the New Testament of one greater than Joseph, I mean of our Saviour, on the occasion of

the death of Lazarus, that "Jesus wept." Religion regulates, no doubt, all the natural feelings of men; but it does not destroy them.

Presently afterwards the meat was set on table, and Benjamin's mess was five times as great as any other, and they eat and drank together, and were cheerful.

Now when the dinner was over, Joseph, who was still unknown to his Brethren, commanded that all their sacks should be filled with corn, and that every one's money should again be put into his sack, and moreover, that a silver cup, being Joseph's own cup, should, together with the money, be put into the sack of Benjamin; and when the morning was come they all went away. And before they were got far from the city, Joseph sent his steward after them, who charged them with having stolen Joseph's cup out of the house. And they immediately denied the charge, and said vehemently, With whomsoever of us it is found, we will agree that he shall die, and that we will all of us be your slaves (or bondmen,) and a search being made, behold the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.—Then they rent their clothes for grief, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city. And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? And Judah, (the same who had promised Jacob that he would be surety for Benjamin) replied, What shall we say unto my Lord; God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: Behold, we will now be bondmen to my Lord. And Joseph said, not so.—But he in whose hand the cup is found, (namely Benjamin) he shall be my slave or servant. But as for you, get you all away to your father in peace."

What a situation had these sons of Jacob got into now! Could any thing be more melancholy and distressful! "O Jacob! Jacob!" they would say, "how shall we ever see thy face in peace, if we bring not back Benjamin with us. Well do we remember the words which did break forth from thee at parting with us. 'Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and now ye will take Benjamin from me.'"

There is one reflection to which I beg to call the minds of my readers in this place. Jacob's sons are now accused unjustly; they are brought into trouble through no fault of theirs: whereas, formerly they had committed a great sin, I mean that of selling their brother Joseph, and had suffered no particular inconveniences from it.—They had not suffered when they did wrong, and yet now they suffer for doing right; for they certainly, as I should think, did right in going down to buy corn for themselves and their aged father, and even in bringing Benjamin with them, under all the circumstances of the case. Let us for a moment stop here and put ourselves in the place of these sons of Jacob. They might now methinks be tempted to say, "Surely there is no righteous governor of the world, for when we do right we only suffer for it, and when we did wrong we all escaped unpunished. We will not believe therefore in a Providence: all things happen alike to all; this world is governed by chance; nay, and the chance is often in favor even of the wicked." To all such profane reasoning, if I had seen Joseph's Brethren at this moment of time, I would have answered, "Stop a little, I beseech you; do not decide so hastily, for remember your story is but half over. By-and-by perhaps your innocence in the present matter will

be cleared up, and for aught you know your former sin, though long since committed, may come to be found out."

Let us apply this remark to ourselves. We often seem to profit for a while by some bad thing that we have done, or at least we suffer no present punishment. Our fraud, our lying, or our act of violence, succeeds for a certain time; and perhaps presently afterwards we chance to get into trouble by doing something, which, on the whole, really seems to have been our duty. Do you never feel tempted to disbelieve in Providence on such occasions? If you are, I would say to you, as I just now observed that I would have said to Joseph's Brethren, Wait a while I beseech you. Remember your story is but half over. Do not decide till you observe the issue. See whether in the end you will not be sorry for every bad thing you have ever done, and glad of every thing which, through God's grace, you have been enabled to do aright, and even though this should not be the case now, it certainly will on the day of judgment.

Joseph discovers himself to his Brethren.

When Joseph had made this proposal of keeping Benjamin as his slave or servant, and of sending the other sons of Jacob home in peace to their father, Judah came forward and related all that had passed in the old man's house when they were bringing Benjamin away. "My father said to us," observed Judah, "Behold I have had two sons and the one went from me," meaning Joseph, "who is torn in pieces, and if ye take this also away, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my grey

hairs with sorrow to the grave." "Now therefore," says Judah, "let me abide instead of the lad as a bondman to my Lord, and let the lad go up with his Brethren. For how shall I go up to my father seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; and it shall come to pass when he seeth that the lad is not with us that he will die."

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him, and he bid every stranger to go out. Then Joseph made himself known to his Brethren; and Joseph wept aloud, so that the Egyptians in the house overheard him. And Joseph said unto his Brethren, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live? And his Brethren could not answer him for they were troubled at his presence.

No wonder that Joseph's Brethren were troubled at this speech. O how bitter a thing is sin. It causes trouble at those moments which ought to be given up to joy. It spreads a gloom over our happiest hours and while those who are not loaded with the same guilt are giving way to the most delightful feelings, it makes the man who is burthened in his conscience to feel a double pang, to feel a pang, I mean, both on account of the sin itself, and also on account of his regret at being unable to join in the general joy that is going forward.

Joseph nevertheless comforts his Brethren. "Now therefore," says he, "be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, for God did send me before to preserve all our lives, so now it was not you that sent me hither but God." How freely does Joseph appear by this speech, to forgive his Brethren! here is no malice, no hatred, no spirit of revenge, no word even of reproof for all the evil they had endeavored to do.

him; but the injured person is himself the comforter of those who had tried to injure him. Here perhaps some one may be ready to say: "true, Joseph did right to forgive his Brethren, for we are all bound to forgive them that trespass against us; methinks however, he might as well have said something to them of their sin for the sake of their own good." I answer that there is a time for all things, and that this was not the time for Joseph to administer reproof. His Brethren were likely just now to be cast down through over-much sorrow, and the thing they needed at this moment was therefore comfort rather than reproof. Your people who take all occasions to reprove without regard to time, or place, or circumstances, though they may say they mean only to do good by it, are apt to be harsh people. They are only indulging their own spirit, and though they may persuade themselves that they are of a forgiving temper at bottom, in fact are not so much so as they think.

But I would observe further, that this extreme kindness of Joseph would, in my opinion, tend to affect the hearts of his Brethren more than the severest reproof. "What (they would now say to themselves) have we sold for a slave a Brother so kind, so generous, so excellent as this! How little did we know of him when we took upon us to sell him! how rashly did we judge concerning his true character, and concerning his intention in those words which gave us so much offence! He was a better man than we, though we all talked so much against him, and even thought him hardly fit to live." I would here beg all my readers to take care how they speak evil of persons without due knowledge of their character. Especially I

would advise you to beware of judging any one on account of his having said or done something which happens to wound your own pride, or to give pain merely to yourself. He may be a good man on the whole, even though he should have erred in this particular, and you may err more by the revenge you take for what he has said that is offensive to you, than he has done by saying it. Take heed then lest some day or other should come when the very person whom you are set against shall have his character cleared before all the world in spite of every thing you have said against him. Take heed lest you should be proved to have been the greater sinner of the two on that day when you shall each of you appear before God and all his holy angels. O that we could all learn something of this kind, and affectionate, and forbearing temper of Joseph. He was as remarkable for it as he was for conquering those secret temptations which I before spoke of.

Joseph having discovered himself to his Brethren is now impatient that they should go to his father. "Haste ye," says he, "and go up to my father and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me Lord of all Egypt.—Come down hither, and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks and thy herds, and all that thou hast, and there will I nourish thee, for there are yet five years of famine to come." "And Joseph fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck." "Moreover he kissed all his Brethren, and wept upon them, and after that his Brethren talked with him." "And the fam

hereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, and it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. And Pharaoh said, Bring your father and your household: take waggons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father and come. And they did so. And Joseph gave to each of them changes of raiment, and he sent to his father ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten more asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way."

Accordingly Jacob having been invited by his sons, and having also been encouraged by God in a dream, arrived in Egypt; and all the souls that went with him, besides his sons' wives, were sixty and six.

"And Joseph made ready his chariot and went to meet his father and fell on his neck and wept a long time. And Jacob said, Now let me die since I have seen thy face, that thou art yet alive. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, "How old art thou?" And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years, and he died."

"Now when Joseph's Brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will requite us for all the evil that we did unto him. And they sent a message to Joseph, saying, that their father before he died commanded them to request of Joseph, that he would forgive their trespasss against him. And Joseph wept to think that they should speak thus unto him, And

Joseph said, "Fear not. As for you, indeed, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good. Now therefore I will nourish you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them. And Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And he said to his Brethren, God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which he promised to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. And Joseph died."

Thus ends the history of Joseph. I have already observed that one of the chief things to be learned from it is the doctrine of a particular Providence. "It was not you" (as Joseph said very justly to his Brethren) that sent me into Egypt; but it was God, that is, it was not you only. Men indeed were the instruments, and men are accountable to God for every part of their own conduct just as much as if there was no Providence in the case. Still, however, though man may act as he pleases, yet God over-rules all things so as to bring about his own purposes. God in this instance had a plan in view. He had made a promise to Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob, who was the father of Isaac, that from him the Savior should come, for that "in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed." In fulfilment of this promise, Isaac and Jacob were born. I should here remark by the way, that to Jacob the name of Israel was given, so that when the Scriptures speak of the Israelites, it is the same thing as if they said the children of Jacob. Of these there were twelve tribes, every one of the sons of Israel becoming the father of a whole tribe. These Israelites after a time were brought out from Egypt, having been very ill-treated there by King Pharaoh, and

they became a great and famous people; for God wrought many miracles in the midst of them, and gave them the law of the Ten Commandments, and set up his worship among them, and separated them from the rest of the world, which continued in ignorance of God and of the Scriptures. It was from these Israelites (or Jews, as they were afterwards called) that the promised Savior came. And blessed be God, this Savior is not the Savior of the Jews only, but He is now preached to us, "upon whom the ends of the world are come." How important then is the story of Joseph in this view. It was a necessary link in the great chain of Providence, and this chain reaches from the beginning of the world even to the end of it. Nor is it with the life of Joseph only, that the Providence of God concerns itself. Your life and mine, and all the various events of it, great and small, from our birth unto our dying hour, are equally under the divine direction. The same God who sent the Ishmaelites to the pit's mouth, when Joseph was so near being left to perish there, the same God who gave Joseph favor in the sight of Potiphar his master, and who afterwards delivered him out of prison and made him ruler over all Egypt, appoints also to us the bounds of our habitation, and orders our whole lot in life. If then, like Joseph, we are serving God, let us not fear to trust him, and though we should fall occasionally into straits as Joseph did, yet let us hope when the end of our days shall come, and when the whole of our story shall be told, that we shall be able to trace the Lord's goodness and mercy even in the most afflictive circumstances of our lives, as we have now been doing in the case of Joseph.

Nor let us wonder at the vast confusion and disorder which we sometimes see in the world in general. Let not our faith fail us if now and then the wicked should seem every where to prosper, and the whole company of the righteous should come under adversity. The history of Joseph shews that it is the plan of Providence sometimes to withdraw in appearance his protection and favor from his own servants, and to put off to a future season the evil day which is coming upon sinners. Soon however the time will come, when all that has been crooked shall be made straight, and all that has been dark in Providence, shall be cleared up.

The story of Joseph, as we also observed, is but a small part of Scripture; it fills but a few pages of that large and comprehensive volume, being connected however with events which go before and with those which follow after. Just so methinks the history of this whole globe of ours is but like a single leaf in a great volume, and it cannot be fully understood until the dealings of God with all his various creatures shall be made known, until the whole book of his Providence shall be opened and until all those events, both past and future with which God's government of this world may be connected, shall be fully revealed. Let us wait therefore, in the exercise of faith and hope, remembering, as the Apostle says, that while we are here below, "We know but in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.—For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. Now we know in part; but then shall we know, even as also we are known."

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